

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

May 3rd, 1944

DEAR MEMBER,

On the eve of the invasion of Europe, which may have begun before these lines are read, a statement was commended to Christian people by the Archbishop of Canterbury and by the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and of the Free Church Federal Council. It is too long to quote in full, but its central ideas deserve our close attention.

EUROPE

We are asked to exercise our imagination and think what the invasion of Europe means. "The continent which has been the home of Western civilization must be rent still further by the ravages and disintegrating effects of total war. . . . Every advance of the liberating armies makes more insistent the question what can be done to restore vitality and health to Europe."

The successful re-building of Europe, it is urged, depends on two things—first, on a profound and passionate belief in the values of the European heritage and a determination to preserve them; and, secondly, on a clear perception of the present inescapable reality of revolutionary change.

The foundations of Europe's greatness in the past have been the conceptions of law and liberty. It is on these that the future structure must be reared. "The first condition of a stable social and international order is the reassertion of the rule of law. From it are derived such vital principles of social and political health as that power must be exercised responsibly and in accordance with law, that justice is an end in itself and not merely an instrument of policy, and that the welfare of persons is more important than material wealth and power." This is one of the two chief strands of which the history of Europe has been woven. The other is the vindication of freedom.

Liberty, it is pointed out, can only grow where there is a right understanding of the relation between the state and society. "Freedom, and the sense of responsibility which is its counterpart, find their most effective exercise in small groups; and the freedom to form and participate in these is perhaps the most essential of all liberties. The family comes first, and after it all the associations which men form to further the common interest of their members, whether religious, artistic, scientific, commercial or of any other kind. In these lies the strength of a free people."

The terrible situation which has to be faced on the continent, as was pointed out in the disquieting letter which we published a few weeks ago (C.N.-L. No. 198) is that totalitarianism has deliberately destroyed

all autonomous life outside the State, so that self-governing groups have ceased to function. It has created a vacuum of frightening proportions such as has never been seen before. Hence, as the Archbishop's statement rightly insists, "a primary task of those who would rebuild Europe will be to aid in restoring and revitalizing, in every country of Europe, this multiplicity of groups, associations, and institutions in which the energies of a healthy society may once more find spontaneous expression."

It is none the less plainly seen that we are living in a time of fundamental change and that "the enduring values of Europe's moral and spiritual tradition will only regain their authority and influence if they are reintegrated in social and cultural patterns that may be widely different from those of former generations."

"Even before the war many far-seeing minds perceived that a long period of history is coming to a catastrophic end and giving place to something entirely new. Hitler's policy has accentuated the process and destroyed in Europe many foundations that cannot be restored. Large changes in economic and social conditions are necessary to make life tolerable for the great majority. The prevalence of poverty, insecurity and mass unemployment makes freedom meaningless outside the circles of the privileged. Advances in science and technology have made possible the elimination of poverty and insecurity, and corresponding changes in social and economic organization are essential to make the fullest use of the new techniques in the interests of social welfare. This will entail a firm determination not to allow sectional interests, whether of private groups or of nations, to stand in the way of whatever policies may be needed to secure full employment and the best utilization of the earth's natural resources."

The statement concludes by reminding us that on this country there rests a special responsibility. The eyes of many in Europe are turned to it in the belief and hope that, alike by its past history and present interest, it will prove itself the champion of freedom and the rule of law. "The principle of toleration, the recognition of certain basic human rights, the conviction that force is no argument and that truth can never be the sole possession of a single group or party, have struck deep roots in the thought and practice of the British Commonwealth. Never was it more urgent that these principles should be reasserted as the fundamental conditions of social health."

It is of the first importance in the coming months to make clear to everyone that these are the values in which the British people believe and to the realization of which their whole energies will be directed.

THE CHURCHES ON THE CONTINENT

If the real fight that alone gives meaning to the clash of arms is, as Vice-Admiral Hallifax wrote in the last issue, the fight for what is right and good, we must continually have in our minds our allies in this warfare on the continent; and, in particular, our fellow-Christians, who in many instances in the occupied countries have shown a bold face against Nazi tyranny, and in Germany itself have taken at certain points an uncompromising stand. Two instances of comparatively recent date may be recorded.

In the autumn of last year an outspoken pastoral letter was addressed by the Dutch Reformed Church to all the parish councils in Holland. Its purpose was to make clear to all members of the Church the danger of the national-socialist outlook, and to warn them that it represents a religious attitude with which the Church will have to reckon for long after the war. The doctrine of national-socialism, it was pointed out, allows nothing outside the State—neither society, nor the family, nor art, nor education—to develop according to its own nature. The totalitarian State presents itself as a superhuman power, claiming to know everything and to control everything; it is accountable to no one because it professes itself to know both good and evil. Within such a political system it is impossible either to lead a free Christian life or to confront the authorities with the commandments of God without calling forth violent reprisals. "It should be clear that the Christian faith and national-socialism are in irreconcilable opposition; the Church must know that compromise is not possible, because the totalitarian claims of the one and the totalitarian claims of the other cannot be united. The call to collaboration must be seen through as a dangerous temptation."

The other instance comes from the Kattowitz diocese in Poland, where the authorities prohibited services in the Polish language and common worship by Poles and Germans in the same church. The matter was referred to Cardinal Bertram, Archbishop of Breslau, who addressed a strong and unequivocal letter to the authorities, which included the following sentences:—

"As far as the Church is concerned there can be no further discussion of the question unless the principles of the Catholic Church and Church Law are to be respected. The Catholic Church is of her very nature a Church common to all the faithful. Any separation on Church matters of the faithful according to their nationality is incompatible with her spirit. In the same way, no priest may refuse any Catholic his spiritual ministrations on account of his nationality. Under no circumstances can the Church depart from this principle. If, therefore, the desired regulation of the spiritual ministry is of such a nature as to require that the German laity shall be cared for exclusively by German clergy, I regret that I am unable to discuss further your suggestion of June 2nd, 1943."

LIBERTY

The Supplement this week is by the Editor of *The Tablet*, who has consented at my request to present to our members, so far as our limit of space allows, the doctrine of political liberty which he has been insistently and impressively expounding in its columns. In its emphasis on society as a much wider and richer concept than the State, the view he sets forth is representative of a large school of thought and has a strong Christian tradition behind it.

The case for individual freedom has found another powerful defender in Professor F. A. Hayek, an Austrian economist, now on the staff of the London School of Economics, in his recent book, *The Road*

to *Serfdom*.¹ A cause is fortunate that can enlist so brilliant an advocate, with unusual powers of orderly and lucid exposition and a remarkable command of vigorous English. Professor Hayek has placed us all in his debt by depicting in plain colours the meaning of totalitarianism and by showing how the road to it may be paved with the best intentions. The world he desires is the kind of world in which most of us doubtless would wish to live, but we are left with the puzzle how to relate it to the actual world with which we have to deal.

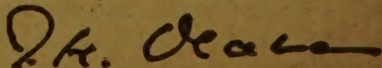
We cannot be warned too often of the threat to man's existence from the concentration of power in a totalitarian State. But Christians may also feel alarm about concentrations of economic power which are socially irresponsible. I had a letter recently from one of our members, in which he says :—

"The advocacy of social pluralism so easily plays into the hands of those whose will to power demands that their enterprizes be kept altogether independent of social control and who defend, not the maintenance of politically independent centres of social initiative and co-operation, but the subordination of the common life of society to anonymous, private purposes. And this is absolutism in its worst sense ; for it gives to destructive forces an independence of communal control and a frankly tyrannical sway over men's lives."

How to overcome these two opposite dangers is the great unsolved political problem of our time. The two sides of the problem, and the tensions which they create for the Christian mind, have seldom been better and more succinctly stated than in a passage in the latest work of the Russian philosopher, Nicolas Berdyaev. It is entitled *Freedom and Slavery*,² and is an original and brilliant study of the meaning of freedom. The author knows that a dynamic philosophy has its springs in the real conflicts of life. In an introductory, autobiographical chapter he lays bear the fundamental attitudes which determine his thought.

"The fundamental contradiction in my thinking about social life is bound up with the juxtaposition in me of two elements—an aristocratic interpretation of personality, freedom and creativeness, and a socialistic demand for the assertion of the dignity of every man, of even the most insignificant of men, and for a guarantee of his rights in life. I stand at the same time near to Nietzsche and to Leo Tolstoy. I value Karl Marx very highly, but I also value J. de Maistre and K. Leontiev. When a levelling tyranny offends against my understanding of the dignity of personality, my love of freedom and creativeness, I rebel against it and I am ready to express my revolt in the extremist form. But when the defenders of social inequality shamelessly defend their own privileges, when capitalism oppresses the labouring masses, and turns a man into a thing, then also I rebel. In both cases I reject the foundations of the contemporary world."

Yours sincerely,



¹ Routledge. 10s. 6d.

² Geoffrey Bles. 25s.

CHRISTIANS AND A FREE SOCIETY

MY DEAR OLDHAM,

I am very glad to respond to your invitation to set out for your readers certain considerations why the Christian, desiring the well-being of mankind, has, it seems to me, a particular duty to take the long view, and not the short view of social policies.

The politician has to live in and by, if not for, popular favour. The formula for political success is that a man should have common opinions and uncommon abilities. He has to be intelligible, and he can argue, with a good deal of reason, that it is not his business to educate the public mind or conscience, but to do the best he can *ad hoc* with the states of mind and feeling that he finds. The Christian, and particularly the ecclesiastic, is in quite a different position. He is not immediately responsible for the policy of the hour, and not dependent, as politicians are, on being immediately understood and supported. One of the great arguments for establishing and endowing religion is that in a healthy society the religious leaders must be independent. What they have to say will very often be valuable precisely because it is not popular or immediately intelligible. Each generation, each time and place, has its particular temptations and blind spots, which need to be corrected by the witness of those who live in a larger tradition, and are above the ebb and flow of day-to-day political life. There can be no prouder record for a religious body than the number of times it has stood out against the spirit of the age, and the prevailing fashions of thought and feeling. To-day it seems to me that Christians have a particular and obvious truth to reaffirm about the whole trend of the time. They are the obvious people to be the champions of the great principle that the political authority must never be allowed to consider itself, or make itself, co-extensive with the range of human life. Society, we must continue to repeat, is a wider concept than the State. A great many people, Christians included, will agree to this; but if a few minutes later you substitute some other word for the State, if you call it "the people," or "the community," but mean exactly the same thing, political majority decision and rule, they will at once abandon the idea that society is a wider concept than the political state.

Christians to-day strike me as particularly prone to the failing of willing the end of a free society, and not being prepared to will the means. The means are limited institutions, limited political action, personal enjoyment of and responsibility over property, and the acceptance of the fact that there will be abuses wherever there is freedom. One of the obvious tests of a genuinely free society is the existence of idle, rich people, a minority tolerated and accepted, although no one approves of them, because they are one of the products of freedom, and freedom has been found in practice, and understood in theory, to be a great good and worth a great price. Yet, it is a common habit of speech for Christian speakers, talking from the platforms where it is so very tempting to say what will be clapped, and not what will be followed by a puzzled silence, to talk in favour of the state organizing a high degree of equality. Christians who are immediately acute to

understand that there was, and is, an immense unresolved contradiction in the principles of 1789, in the cry for liberty and the cry for equality, are much slower to acknowledge the conflict when the adjective "Christian" prefixes liberty or equality. For my part, I very much dislike this current fashion of putting the adjective "Christian" in front of secular ideals, rather in the way the adjective "Royal" is often used as a prefix for circuses or theatres or watering places. The adjective has a certain rhetorical value, but it very often means, not that the noun has been annexed to Christian doctrine, but that Christians are joining some secular camp. They are often tempted to do this when the secular camp in question is plainly full of men of goodwill, with some project for relieving some form or other of human suffering. Warm-hearted men, especially if they are in Holy Orders and keenly sensitive to any accusations of indifference to the poor, will rush in, and underwrite proposals which look humane but are in fact against the general interest, and most particularly against the interests of the poor. There is no space here to discuss what is the economic background against which we must frame our politics, and I can only record, and not argue for the truth of, the conclusion that it is one of increasing material wealth which makes it a paradoxical absurdity to reconcile ourselves now to the regimented life.

How ironical it will be, and what a reproach to Christians, if the next generation of young English men and women grow up with a much higher level of material well-being than their parents and grandparents, but with far less effective freedom of choice in the essential matters of life, like power over their bodies, over their occupations and activities, over their children. Yet that grim paradox is all too likely to be realized, and if it is realized, it will not be in the least from inherent necessities of a practical or economic kind, but from a spiritual change in ourselves, the loss of an appetite for freedom, and the coming of an appetite for security, largely due, it may be, to the electorate having become predominantly feminine. Security is a basic feminine need, and since the full enfranchisement of women the successful political slogans have been Safety First, Collective Security, Social Security.

In all this, as it seems to me, Christians have a particular duty to lead and not to follow. It may be true that proletariats, or that women, undervalue liberty, and that a condition of property-less insecurity makes men who live under close factory and trade union discipline anyway conclude that the State will be a more considerate master than the market. It does not in the least follow that such an attitude, although it be a majority attitude, is anything but an unhealthy one; it is the patient calling out for a quick remedy instead of for the slower restoration to genuine health. But we should be slow to conclude that there is a strong popular tide, too powerful to be resisted, so that although economic facts do not in the least compel these changes, psychological facts do. There is no space here to examine that question. I can only record my own belief that the drive for these policies does not come from the general public, and least of all from the very poor, who have an instinctive, inherited, distrust of state authority; it comes from the "new clerisy," the people who themselves live at a higher economic level and use the condition of the poor as an argument for an

extension of the State in which they believe philosophically and as a substitute for religion. Over and over again we can recognize how the idea of the Church has been carried over into politics, reappearing as the brotherhood of man without God. This process begins nobly and pleasantly with post-Christian men thinking they will leave difficult and doubtful theology and concentrate on limited positive good things, the corporal works of mercy organized on the enormous scale of modern States; but the end, sometimes reached at a leap, is to *de-grade* men by coming to value them for their usefulness to the community and the common life.

In the last weeks we have seen so intelligent a man as Mr. R. A. Butler slipping into language which implies that the purpose of education is to be defined as the making of good citizens. He was discussing an amendment on whether secondary schools should be allowed any longer to charge fees, and he said it would be immoral if a parent were allowed by paying to secure for his child a place in a school which would otherwise go to a child who was "potentially the better citizen." Yet in the Christian tradition in which the Grammar schools were founded, education was never conceived of in that narrow political way, and Christians ought to be foremost in keeping the conception of education much wider than education for citizenship; it is the formation of boys and girls to be men and women, and Christian education is to make them Christian men and women, to fulfil a bigger rôle than can be subsumed under civics or citizenship. It is surely a most short-sighted attitude for Christians to acquiesce in education being brought, as it is being brought, more and more under political control.

So, too, the wealth which men make and enjoy should not be thought of as *one income* which the State is to lay out. It is a growing fashion of thought to say that the question whether we can afford this or that is meaningless, that *we* are merely redistributing *our* income; language which is reasonable about the public revenue, that portion of wealth which is collected for public purposes, is now used about all wealth. It is all spoken of as the community's wealth, and the interesting question is thought to be, what is the best way of spending it. It is fundamental to keep the clearest distinction between public revenue and private wealth if the great distinction between society and the State is to be maintained; yet how easily Christians slip into this language under the impression they must not be backward in showing a sense of community of goods.

The provision men make for themselves and their families in sickness or old age should not be mainly a State matter, or it will be increasingly integrated with an official view taken of a man's value as a citizen to the State. We cannot expect an independent public opinion from dependent pensioners, whose own savings are collected by law and can then be used as pledges for their docile behaviour. In education, health, insurance, the lesser corporate body—the school with its governors, the hospital with its governors, the medical profession or insurance business—are the proper means and channels and institutions; they need, in varying degrees, an ultimate supervision from the side of the State to prevent grave abuses; they need to be moralized—the world of insurance in particular, and seen as the better professions see

themselves, as existing to fulfil a valuable function. But the resulting society would be a free society for the ordinary man, who would know the limited power of each organization or association.

To-day he faces the growing probability that all the particulars about him will be gathered on one card in an official index; whether he is a regular worker who does what is allotted to him, or an obstinate one who holds out for particular kinds of work, whether he obeys about his health and has had the recommended operation, whether he has accepted the educational decisions made about his children; and the authority which through his life collects these particulars about him is also the authority to whom he must look for support in his old age. No honest man can say that this is certainly very far away, although it is still happily in the future. But if it should come, and the plantation way of life should become the lot of the modern Englishman, and then, little by little, social historians begin to recover the picture of the English liberty that has been lost, men will begin to ask what the leaders of the Christian bodies had said and done in that critical first half of the twentieth century. They ask that very question to-day about the Bishops a century ago, and the answer is that they went with what they felt was the predominant mood of their society. Now we all wish there had been a more courageous note of criticism between 1750 and 1850. So to-day the need is for a keener sense that the foundation of the Church, as the greatest of all voluntary associations, brought into human life the answer to the otherwise constant drift to totalitarianism. The curse of the State of antiquity, wrote Lord Acton, was that it was Church and State in one; the creation of the Church on the same institutional plane as the State introduced a healthy dualism, and gave birth to the specific civilization called Christendom, whose keynote was plurality, that life was lived in and through many forms of association, and that political power was inevitably limited. In the modern age the State has been escaping century by century from that limitation, and spreading itself over more and more of life. If the process goes on to the point that the press and opinion is taken under the State, the new pattern may maintain itself for long generations. It will be a society in which governments will treat their citizens well as long as they obey, a society which will be at once much richer than earlier generations, and quite unfree. It will have come about stage by stage; and among those who will cut the sorriest figures in history will be the ecclesiastics who never ceased, indeed, to say how much they valued freedom, but who, on each particular issue, lent their voice to support each new measure and stage by which freedom was, in fact, curtailed, until, little by little, all the passes had been sold.

Yours very sincerely,

DOUGLAS WOODRUFF

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